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Narrative Style in Ozu's Silent Films

The peculiarities of Yasujiro Ozu's film style have been the subject of several important essays, most notably that of Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell in *Screen*,¹ which explores Ozu's unorthodox treatment of space and revises the humanist and/or mystical interpretations of Ozu's work by Donald Richie and Paul Schrader.² Missing in the Ozu literature, however, is an analysis of Ozu as a narrator. Richie emphasizes Ozu's disinterest in plot,³ Schrader sees his narratives as directed toward "the expression of the Transcendent,"⁴ while Thompson, Bordwell, and Noël Burch see him eschewing the demands of narrative to play with space independent of narrative.⁵ In his *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell includes Ozu among the "parametric" filmmakers, who are defined as creating patterns "distinct from the demands of the syuzhet [plot] system."⁶ Ozu, however, was far more involved in his stories than any of these authors suggest, and, while Bordwell is partly correct in asserting Ozu's interest in style for its own sake, many of Ozu's stylistic patterns are not purely formal in intent, content, or effect, but reflect Ozu's narrative and thematic interests. Moreover, previous authors have treated Ozu's art as fundamentally static and have alluded only slightly to the changes that took place in his style over thirty years. Yet Ozu's style changed greatly from the prewar to the postwar periods and also changed within those major periods.

In this essay I will explore the narrative style Ozu developed in his silent period, noting the changes that took place within it and possible sources for it. I will demonstrate that Ozu's style was intrinsically connected to both the narrative process and the meaning of his films.

Avoiding the sound revolution as long as possible, Ozu made 34 silent features between 1927 and 1935. Twenty of these films are lost, twelve from the period 1927–1929, from which only one film remains. For the period 1930–

1932, seven films are lost and seven remain, while from 1933–1935, only one film is lost. Thus the accuracy with which one can judge Ozu's stylistic development increases as the period progresses.

Conspicuous in Ozu's early narrative style is his dependence on objects to convey narrative sense. In this respect he echoes the German *Kammerspiel* film, which probably influenced him.⁷ Objects occur in a variety of formats: close-ups of small animals or household items, tracking shots for a series of small objects or architectural interiors, and long shots for architectural and landscape elements. Unique in the silent films is Ozu's objectification of the human body, which occurs as hands or feet manipulating other objects or as bodies framed from the waist or from the knees down.

Ozu's shots of inanimate objects and unpeopled landscapes have been noted by many authors who refer to them as empty or still-life or even "pillow" shots. Ozu's intention with such shots, however, is frequently misread. Thompson and Bordwell write, "To a large extent objects are divorced from function in Ozu's films. They become pure spatial elements, parts of still-life compositions; they are separated from any function in the flow of the narrative."⁸ On the contrary, Ozu's objects are almost never divorced from narrative or thematic functions in his films; in fact they serve many overlapping functions. Sometimes they are obvious symbols such as the wheel spinning in a rut, which opens *I Was Born, But . . .* and summarizes the plight of the salaried worker as presented in the film; frequently they are symbols of transience and passage as in shots of passing trains, bridges, smoke issuing from chimneys, steam from tea kettles, changing cloud formations, and clocks.⁹

The vast majority of objects in Ozu's silent films, contrary to Thompson and Bordwell's assertion, generate the narrative either as parts

representing the whole or as references to contiguous environments. These functions correspond respectively to synecdoche and metonymy, narrative processes in literature.¹⁰ For example, reasonably complex activities are depicted by extensive sequences of objects in motion. Such extensive sequences occur in *Walk Cheerfully* (1930), *Tokyo Chorus* (1931), and *Where Are Now the Dreams of Youth?* (1932) and suggest Soviet influence although this influence was probably mediated by the Germans.¹¹ The following example from *Walk Cheerfully* recalls Ruttman's *Berlin, Symphony of a City*.

- (1) window shade going up—seen from outside
- (2) window shade going up—seen from inside
- (3) another window shade going up
- (4) waist-down shot of people walking along a sidewalk
- (5) waist-down shot of people going up some steps to an office building
- (6) CU of hats being hung up
- (7) knees-down shot of people going up office steps
- (6.) CU of hats being hung up
- (8) CU of covers being taken off typewriters
- (9) MS of a woman standing by the office window and powdering her nose
- (10) CU of her compact on the window sill
- (11) knees-down shot of people walking on the sidewalk—a circle of light from the compact hits the sidewalk—a pair of female feet stop
- (12) MS of the heroine Yasue looking up (to see where the circle of light is coming from)

While the significance of this particular office building is not obvious until the end of the sequence, the activity depicted—an office building opening up—is clear and, with the exception of shot 9, is presented entirely through object shots.

Many scenes in Ozu's early films begin with abbreviated versions of these object-dominated sequences: the close-up of an object in motion joined by a match-on-action to a medium shot of someone manipulating that object. For example, a scene in *I Flunked, But . . .* (1930) begins with a CU of a goldfish bowl; smoke blows around it; then we cut to a MS of the hero blowing smoke on the bowl. Another scene begins with a CU of a baseball magazine whose pages are being turned; a box of matches drops onto the magazine; cut to a MS of a student lighting a cigarette while he looks at the magazine. In *The Lady and the Beard* (1931) one scene begins with a coat fly-

ing onto a sofa; hands pick it up; cut to a MS of a servant holding the coat.

Shots of disembodied hands or feet manipulating objects dwindled after *Dreams of Youth*, a film made in 1932 when shooting on *I Was Born, But . . .* stopped to allow one of the children, who had been injured, to recover. Ozu revived the practice three and a half films later in *Passing Fancy* (1933) and then abandoned it altogether. If European films from the 1920s were indeed the inspiration for these sequences, Ozu appears to have used them less as he got farther away in time from the source.

Obviously Ozu's shots of objects manipulated by an unidentified human narrate, but not in a straightforward way. We see a goldfish bowl with smoke around it and then see who is blowing the smoke. We see a baseball magazine with pages being turned and then see who is turning them. In each case effect precedes cause. Such inversion of cause and effect pervades numerous aspects of Ozu's narrative technique. Frequently dialogue titles appear before the speaker or, more confusing, the titles are followed by the listener instead of the speaker. *Passing Fancy* contains the most complex sequences of this sort. One scene begins:

Title: "Whatever you think, I choose my own women. Pick-ups aren't in my line."

MS: Kihachi (the protagonist).

Title: "She's too good for you."

MS: Jiro (the romantic lead).

Kihachi and Jiro are arguing about Harue, the young woman they have befriended, whom Kihachi loves and Jiro distrusts. Jiro, nevertheless, is the object of Harue's affections, and presumably Kihachi has just tried to persuade him to marry her. The first line of dialogue therefore belongs to Jiro and the second to Kihachi. However, until the fourth cut in this sequence, we have no indication that Jiro is even participating in the conversation. By the time we find out, we must sort back over two lines of dialogue to figure out who said what and then infer why.

Similarly, Ozu's tendency to show the aftermath of a dramatic story event instead of the event itself forces the audience to infer cause from effect. In *An Inn in Tokyo* the little boys lose a bundle containing the family's only possessions. We can imagine how angry their hard-pressed father will be, but the next scene

shows them sitting with bowed heads in front of their father *after* he has vented his anger. No reference is made to the lost bundle until two scenes later. Arriving late on the scene, viewers must fill in for themselves the missing action. Elsewhere in the film Ozu uses a similar if less significant omission to create comedy. The boys do not want to get up in the morning despite their father's prodding. A hairbrush comes flying into a shot of them sleeping at which point they sit bolt upright. In medium shot their father turns and walks away. The boys lie down again and then, without visible cause, sit bolt upright again. Obviously their father has yelled at them, but we have not been shown it—and since the film is silent, we have not heard it—but on the basis of the boys' action must surmise it. (The joke here is partly on Ozu's company, which told him to make *Inn in Tokyo* "as though it were sound."¹² Thus the action depends on off-screen sound, the humor on the fact the film has no sound.)

In the foregoing instance Ozu inverted cause and effect to create comedy. Yet his reasons for inverting them so often and on so many levels throughout his silent period are less obvious. Bordwell argues vehemently against the possibility of interpreting such "parametric" patterning,¹³ yet Ozu's form and content are not as separate as Bordwell would have us believe.

Passing Fancy provides a clue. Ozu intensified his use of inversion in that film: he revived the technique of cutting from an object in motion to its manipulator (from a hand sketching a clock to a medium shot of the boy Tomio to whom the hand belongs), and he created complexly inverted dialogue passages.

In addition the film contains two riddles, which come from Tomio: "Why does a hand have five fingers? So it will fit in a glove," and "Why is sea water salty? Because salted salmon live there." In both riddles, the humor derives from reversing cause and effect. Consider that *Passing Fancy*'s story portrays a boy who must take care of his father even to the point of beating on him, while the father remains childish and irresponsible to the very end. In fact we learn the salted salmon joke because the father repeats it to himself at the end of the film, thus assuming the child's

lines. Consequently the reversals that pervade many aspects of *Passing Fancy*'s narrative style reflect the narrative content.

Of course, inversions of cause and effect occur in all of Ozu's silent films, and his motive for inventing such a radical technique was not simplistic. The process of inverting cause and effect evidently fascinated him; yet a remarkable confluence exists between the process that fascinated him stylistically and the tragicomic world he presents in his films, where honest work is hard to come by and children risk death for lack of affordable medical care, where flunking is more profitable than graduating and capricious bosses determine the private lives of their employees, a world, in other words, in which everything is the opposite of what it should be. Nor is Ozu's vision of a world turned upside down limited to social problems. In *A Story of Floating Weeds*, the characters are resigned to a world where the natural order is inverted: where a father is more or less permanently separated from his son. The pattern of inversion in Ozu's film style illustrates the world he created; that the process was probably unconscious is immaterial: style and content fit.

Having examined Ozu's use of synecdochic close-ups, that is objects or unidentified body parts in motion, and having linked them to an overall pattern of reversing cause and effect, I will now return to the second category of Ozu's object shots, the static objects or landscapes, the metonymic shots. These are the so-called empty or still-life shots which call so much attention to themselves in the late films. They show objects which are part of, associated with, or representative of a particular environment. Before 1932 they occur less frequently and with less complexity than after and usually in connection with synecdochic close-ups. However, they occur in *Walk Cheerfully* (1930), *I Flunked, But . . .* (1930), and *Tokyo Chorus* (1931). By examining the use of these shots in the pre-1932 films, one can better understand their significance in the later films.

Walk Cheerfully begins with a scam perpetrated by its gangster heroes, Kenji and Senko. Near the waterfront Senko steals a wallet and, surrounded by an angry mob, invites a gentle-

man to search him, while he passes the wallet to Kenji, posing as part of the outraged mob. The fruitless search concluded, the crowd moves off leaving only a ship's crane on camera. A shot of three rickshaws follows, then a shot of bilge water pouring out of a ship. Then we see Senko in a different location running among the boxcars on the dock. The still-life shots repeat information the audience already has—the scene's location on the waterfront—and serve as a form of ellipsis, allowing Senko to get from one location within the dock area to another. Ellipsis is one of the few narrative functions Thompson and Bordwell grant Ozu's still life shots,¹⁴ but he developed others as time went on.

In *I Flunked, But . . .* the scene after several boys flunk their final exam begins with a close-up of a noose. The camera pulls back and reveals the noose to be part of the cord for a ceiling lamp; cut to a pyramid-shaped marker reading "Administration" with a tapping hand near it; next a medium shot of a university administrator tapping his hand near the pyramid marker on his desk. The noose is both a symbol and a joke. The hand tapping near the pyramid adheres to the pattern of the synecdochic close-up. The shots become metonymies, however, when they are repeated later in the film and thus by association signal both the location of the ensuing scene and the characters who will appear in it.

In *Tokyo Chorus* a sequence in which the hero meets his former colleague doing menial labor near the zoo begins with the title "City of Unemployment" followed by the tops of a tower and a chimney, then an oblique view of buildings photographed from the middle up. The buildings shown are from Tokyo; thus the "City of Unemployment" is Tokyo. This is the only surviving instance in which Ozu labelled his still-life shots, but his doing so here is evidence that he considered still-life shots as possible locale markers with which to introduce a scene. In *Dreams of Youth* he used two still-life shots to indicate a change of locale when the students move from the university grounds to a local sweet shop. Shots of them heading for the sweet shop are followed by the top of the university bell tower then a sign reading "Bakery Blue Hawaii." In this case the still-life shots repeat and verify the students' stated intentions. To the extent

that he omitted such redundancy, Ozu rendered the still-life shots harder to read. That he intended them to be read, however, and not simply admired as digressions into narratively insignificant space, is suggested by the following sequence from *Tokyo Chorus*. The hero Okajima comes home to find that his wife won't speak to him. Unknown to him, she has, while on a trip to town, seen him doing menial labor for his former teacher. He takes off his coat and looks around the room. What he sees follows in three still-life shots:

- his wife's good kimono hanging out
- some packages laid beneath the kimono
- two white tabi (socks) sitting on a windowsill to air

Cut back to Okajima taking this in, then the title: "Did you go out today?" In this sequence of static shots of objects, akin to so many others in Ozu's films, one character reads the shots and interprets them. No random digression, the shots tell him what the audience already knows: that his wife was in town during the day. Significantly the shots are presented without an eyeline match and without cuts back to Okajima to indicate that his gaze is travelling from one object to another. Only his response tells us that he sees them, but he thereby supplies a model for Ozu's audience.

Reasoning on the basis of the objects he sees, that his wife has been to town, Okajima works backwards from effect to cause. To the extent that still-life shots lack redundancy (i.e., they have never been shown before or do not repeat information given in another form), interpreting them often requires viewers to read backwards, sometimes over a considerable length of time. Reading backwards is not always the same as reading from effect to cause, however. Sometimes one must simply acquire more subsequent information to interpret a given still life. For example, in *Tokyo Chorus*, the scene in which Okajima is fired ends with him telling his colleague, "I'm going to buy a bicycle. . . ." followed by a single shot of streetcar wires. The wires are followed by a shot of Okajima's son eating watermelon by the side of a dirt road, and a scene unfolds in which the boy plays with his friend's bicycle and then fights with his father, who brings home a scooter instead of the promised bicycle. The single shot of the streetcar wires

probably indicates Okajima's trip to buy the scooter. Much later in the film the streetcar wires reappear in a travelling shot introducing the scene in which Mrs. Okajima and her children ride the streetcar to the city. Thus the significance of the wires earlier in the film is more firmly established.

A Story of Floating Weeds opens with Kihachi's troupe arriving at the station. The scene ends with a long shot of the last member leaving the station and is followed by:

- two vertical banners
- a poster advertising the show
- Title: "Are you going to see the show tonight?"
- a man having his hair cut.

The man who asks the question and is having his hair cut is an actor from Kihachi's troupe; a scene in the barbershop follows, and we are left wondering about the banners that began the sequence. Later they are established as being outside the theater; they precede a number of scenes that take place in the theater and are never shown outside this context again. In the early sequence they evidently indicate that the troupe has established itself in the theater.

In both of these examples, the still-life shots stand not simply for a place but for an entire activity. However, confirming the nature of that activity requires the audience to read backwards. Like reversing cause and effect, requiring the audience to read backwards results in a time-bound puzzle which denies viewers immediate access to narrative information but instead requires them to put the pieces together as they become available. Similar is Ozu's practice of deliberately misreading the viewer when scene changes occur. In *Walk Cheerfully* Kenji meets his friend Senko, who has found a job as a chauffeur. Senko invites Kenji to get in his car, and the scene ends with Senko and Kenji driving away. A title reading "The Job Kenji Found" appears followed by a travelling shot taken out the window of a moving car. We assume that Kenji is still riding with Senko and that we will watch him find his job. Instead, when the car stops, Senko and his boss get out of it and look up to where Kenji is washing windows on the company's building. Instead of indicating the continuation of the previous scene, the travelling shot out the car window occurs at a much later time after a major story event—Kenji finding his job—has taken place.

Another suppressed transition occurs in *I Was Born, But . . .* when a close-up of a telephone pole creates an easily misread pivot between two scenes, both of which contain telephone poles.¹⁵ Ozu suppresses scene changes most often, however, through graphic matches. In *Walk Cheerfully* he cuts from a tightly framed shot of Kenji washing a window, photographed from inside, peering through the empty space he has cleaned, to a close-up of an empty space in a shoji screen that slides past the camera. The shots are so similar that it takes a moment to realize that we are no longer looking at Kenji's window, and it takes a cut to a medium shot to realize we are watching the heroine's mother, in another time and place, repairing her shoji. In *I Flunked, But . . .* the previously mentioned shot of the baseball magazine spread out on the floor is preceded by a shot of two students in a completely different location, who disappear behind a newspaper, which then fills the frame. These students have been discussing baseball: thus the cut from the newspaper to the baseball magazine matches graphically and topically and suppresses the scene change.

Although Thompson and Bordwell discuss at great length Ozu's penchant for creating graphic matches both within and between scenes, they fail to recognize that the motivation for many of the transitional matches is the suppression of scene change rather than "indifference . . . to the temporal and causal chain of the narrative" (my emphasis).¹⁶ Insofar as Ozu deliberately suppressed cues for scene changes through graphic matches or by showing similar actions, objects, and/or subject matter, he cannot be called "indifferent" to the temporal chain of the narrative. Rather he deliberately confuses his viewer, forcing him to think back over and reconstruct the narrative after the pictures have passed.

Within the *mise en scène* Ozu's camera was likewise disinclined to give in easily to a viewer's desire for narrative information. Although he moves his camera quite often in the early films—over groups of people or objects, to follow action or to capture the view from a moving vehicle—he frequently refuses to reframe or refocus to accommodate an audience's natural interest in the story's protagonists. For example, in *Walk Cheerfully* the flapper Chieko keeps throwing Senko's hat out the

window of a moving car. The second time the hat falls, the camera frames it in the lower left corner. Senko comes toward the hat and consequently towards the camera, but in doing so his upper body goes out of frame: we have only a waist-down view of him until he bends over to pick up the hat. However, such fixity of camera position calls little attention to itself in the early films since many shots frame only the lower part of the human figure to begin with.

The stubborn camera is more noticeable when it refuses to refocus on a protagonist, a practice that appears to begin with *I Was Born, But . . .* in 1932; it corresponds with the shift from the synecdochic close-up to the metonymic still life that took place at about the same time, in which the individual shot becomes more important than the cleverly cut sequence. A scene in *I Was Born, But . . .* begins with a close-up of the family's belongings piled beside a window in the new house. The truck encountered at the beginning of the film drives into the frame and can be seen through the window as the little boys get out. However, the view through the window is out-of-focus, and the camera never refocuses; only a cut to a medium shot of the boys satisfies our desire to see them clearly. Yet Ozu was not indifferent to the possibility of rack focus. In *Woman of Tokyo's* opening shot, he racks his focus from one group of objects to another, but later in the same scene he refuses to rack from a pile of objects to the heroine, who sits out-of-focus in the back of the shot. Obviously then the stubborn camera was not a simply a stylistic device adopted for indiscriminate use throughout the film oblivious to the narrative. Rather it was used specifically in relation to the narrative as a way of impeding the viewer's comprehension.

In fact, all of the narrative strategies discussed thus far—reversal of cause and effect, cryptic still-life shots, and disguised transitions—all slow the viewer's comprehension. Far from being indifferent to his narratives, Ozu deliberately sabotaged their forward progress. Why? *Tokyo Chorus's* sequence at the zoo suggests a reason. Okajima meets his former colleague, who has been reduced to carrying sandwich boards to make a living. Suddenly people start rushing past them; when the men ask why, they are told that a

bear has escaped. The friend suggests that they too run to see the bear, but Okajima rejects the suggestion, saying, "The bear won't affect our lives in any way." Ozu seems to reject the onward rush of story information in traditional narrative for much the same reason: the outcome of the story won't affect our lives in any way.

At the same time that he rejected traditional narration, Ozu created rich subtexts for his films involving both sociopolitical commentary and a nostalgia for the passing of life. The last of his narrative techniques that I wish to discuss here will shed some light on his development of subtexts. The technique is that of substituting one narrative event for another event that the audience anticipates seeing because of its greater centrality to the story. At times the substituted event has, in fact, greater significance than the anticipated event; at other times the substituted event simply gives the audience less direct and therefore more muted access to the emotions surrounding a central event. In the silent films this technique is not fully developed and occurs as characters substituting for each other instead of whole events. For example, in *I Flunked, But . . .* the scene which makes clear that the protagonist and his friends have flunked their final exam is followed by the previously described noose sequence. As the noose sequence unfolds, we feel sure that the protagonist must be in the office facing the administrator. Instead we find that another student, who passed the exam but feels indebted to the protagonist, is talking with the administrator about the protagonist's poor showing. His distress substitutes for the protagonist's although only in part since we later catch up to the hero and experience his keen, albeit less effusive, disappointment.

In *Tokyo Chorus* substitution is used when the hero Okajima goes to the state employment bureau. The scene begins with a traveling shot over the backs of unemployed laborers sitting on a curbstone. We see:

- a frontal shot of two of the laborers looking upwards
- smokestacks against the sky (their POV)
- two other men, A and B, sitting next to the steps outside the bureau; B is unwrapping a packet;
- match-on-action to a CU of cigarette butts in a paper wrapper

- full shot of Okajima walking along the street smoking
- knees-down shot of Okajima; his cigarette butt drops to his feet; he starts to walk out of the frame;
- A and B next to the steps: A gets up to retrieve the butt, goes out of frame; B looks on; Okajima, knees-down, walks up the steps; A returns with the butt and speaks . . . Title: "Even a gentleman like him is jobless."
- MS of B
- MS of A, who looks off
- bicycle in a bicycle rack (A's POV)
- two-shot of A and B still sitting by the steps: they look as though they might steal the bicycle; they look up the steps (to see if anyone is coming); Okajima, waist-down, comes down the steps;
- match-on-action to a full shot of Okajima from the back (men's POV).

From this point on the action returns to Okajima, and we never see the laborers again. They function as a substitute for Okajima, who in this scene pays an apparently fruitless visit to the employment bureau. His daughter's illness has taken all his money, and he is no doubt extremely depressed and feeling desperate. But instead of showing us Okajima's mounting desperation as he talks vainly with the officials, Ozu foregrounds the visit with a portrait of unemployed laborers so desperate that they scrounge cigarette butts and are about to steal a bicycle. They are not meant to contrast with Okajima (who is a "gentleman" and can still afford cigarettes) but to represent his desperation. The POV shot of the smokestacks, made early in the sequence, identifies the workers with Okajima, who throughout the film in times of desperation looks up and sees trees or chimneys against the sky. Thus Ozu avoids a direct confrontation with Okajima's emotional state in this scene and gives it to us instead through the workers by inference. Later, when Okajima must perform manual labor and afterwards confront his mortified wife, he describes himself as a drowning man. The film's emotional climax, the confrontation between Okajima and his wife is especially strong both because we have not seen Okajima describe his desperation before and because he has been identified with the laborers in the earlier scene.

Identifying the day laborers with Okajima also suggests the common interests all workers have. Earlier in the film, Okajima tries to

make this point to his boss's secretary, who persists in defending the boss even though he is so poorly paid he can't afford a new pair of shoes. (Ozu gave Marx a nod in several other early films. In *The Lady and the Beard* Marx's picture hangs improbably in the baron's house and in one scene appears behind the hero in a succession of shots. In *I Flunked, But . . .* the roommates give the clenched-fist salute while forming the word "Bread" with their arms and legs as a signal to the baker's daughter.)

At the other end of the spectrum is Ozu's un-Marxist nostalgia. *Tokyo Chorus* ends with the former teacher and students singing a song about the sadness of parting, and a sequence of one-shots alternating between Okajima and the teacher shows them fighting back their tears. At one point the teacher asks the men how many are married and how many have children, thus noting their progress through the various stages of life. In many of the silent films Ozu contrasts the different generations, treats reunions and partings with pathos, and inserts symbols of transience such as smoking chimneys and steaming tea kettles. If narrative drama won't affect our lives in any way, clearly social problems and the passing of time do. Thus the reunion at the end of *Tokyo Chorus* becomes central while the resolution of Okajima's problem (a job the teacher has pulled strings to get him) is incidental. If Ozu's unusual narrative technique teases his viewer, making it hard for him to follow the bear, it thereby helps raise subtext to the level of text.

NOTES

1. "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen* 17:2 (Summer 1976).
2. Donald Richie, *Ozu* (Berkeley: 1974); Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: 1972).
3. Richie, *Ozu*, p. 23ff.
4. Schrader, *Transcendental Style*, p. 49.
5. Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 73; Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: 1979), p. 166f.
6. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, Wisconsin: 1985), p. 275.
7. For the influence of German Expressionist films in Japan, see Tadao Sato, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, trans. Gregory Barrett (New York: 1982), p. 32. For the preoccupation with objects in the *Kammerspielfilm*, see Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: 1973), p. 192f. and Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: 1974), p. 102f.
8. Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 64.

9. For more on this see Kathe Geist, "Yasujiro Ozu: Notes on a Retrospective," *Film Quarterly* 37:1 (Fall 1983), pp. 4-7.
10. See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (Paris: 1971), p. 92, which refers to "synecdochic 'close-ups' and metonymic 'set-ups'" occurring in film narrative.
11. According to David Bordwell, who has studied the matter more than anyone else, there is no external evidence of Ozu's

exposure to Soviet cinema.

12. Richie, *Ozu*, p. 221.

13. Bordwell, *Narration*, p. 188-9.

15. See Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 49 for frame enlargements of this transition.

16. Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 71.

MARSHA KINDER

José Luis Borau *On the Line* of the National/International Interface in the Post-Franco Cinema

José Luis Borau's latest film *Rio Abajo* (On the Line, 1983-84)—a border film made on both sides of the Rio Grande—has placed its director "on the line" in several senses. Having established residency in Hollywood by spending six months of each year in Sherman Oaks, a suburb of Los Angeles where he owns a home, for the past nine years Borau has been commuting between Madrid and Hollywood, between the language of the European art film and the generic conventions of Hollywood, between working in self-chosen exile as an international *auteur* and remaining one of the pivotal national figures and one of the greatest success stories in the New Spanish cinema.

Like earlier Borau films (such as *Furtivos*, *Camada Negra*, and *Mi Querida Señorita*), *Rio Abajo* works the boundaries between sexual and political discourse—the same border zone explored by Buñuel, another Spaniard known for making movies outside his homeland. Like *Touch of Evil*, this border film explores the ambiguous line between good and evil: in fact, the American coproducer, Steven Kovacs, told me that to make this connection explicit, Borau had originally hoped to cast Orson Welles in the cameo role of "El Gabacho," the philosophical old gangster who finances the border crossings—a role that was played in the film by Sam Jaffe shortly before he died.

Although *Rio Abajo* has proved to be a critical and commercial success in Spain, because of the limited size of its home market

that success could pay only the interest on the Spanish loans that Borau had incurred to make the film; in order to make back the principal, the movie must do well outside of Spain—in Latin America, in Europe, and most importantly, in the prime market for which it was intended, the United States. According to Kovacs:

Counting the interest that has accumulated on the loans over the past four years, the film cost over three million dollars. It would be almost impossible for Borau to recoup his losses on this film—even if it did receive adequate distribution. But so far American distributors have dismissed the film as a dirty Mexican picture. To them all Spanish-speaking people are alike—Spaniards, Mexicans, Argentinians—filthy, conniving subhumans.

When I interviewed Borau in June of 1985, he told me: "The film opened in Spain in November of 1984. It's due to open here in the States in September or October, to be distributed by New World Pictures. It will open in six markets with an advertising budget of \$250,000." But when I spoke to Borau again in July of 1986, he said that the deal with New World Pictures had fallen through. After Borau had his overseas agent Robert Little (of Overseas Film Group) sell *Rio Abajo* in other foreign markets such as Italy and Japan in order to recoup the costs of redoing the sound track for the American version, New World was no longer willing to pay the \$250,000, which had been their offer for total world rights. Borau rejected their new offer and continued searching for a company that would put up a more substantial advance. As

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⁹ **Yasujiro Ozu: Notes on a Retrospective**

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